

**Miss Porter's House
Submission to
NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure
Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy 2012**

March 2013

Introduction

Miss Porter's House Management Committee looks forward to the revitalisation of the West End of Newcastle. This present submission outlines the evolving place of the Porter family and the house known as Miss Porter's House in the commercial, social and cultural landscapes of Newcastle West since the family set up there in about 1880. It briefly recounts the history of the family and the House, outlines how the House is managed as a House Museum of the National Trust of Australia, and then discusses the value of the House in the revitalised city.

Importantly, as a heritage building, the vision for Miss Porter's House warrants a longer view: we should think in terms of centuries rather than decades.

It is important that Miss Porter's House be included as a vital element in the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy.

Present place of MPH in the West End

Miss Porter's House is located at 434 King Street, Newcastle West. Its significance extends to all of the West End and indeed the city of Newcastle.

In recent years the immediate area has been characterised by decline: derelict buildings, the subsequent demolition of some of them, and the spasmodic development of a few new buildings. It is characterised too by the proliferation of cheap pubs, tattoo parlours, sex shops and brothels.

On a brighter note Miss Porter's House is one of a number of buildings in the area which are rich in heritage value. These include - for example - the former police station, the TAFE art school buildings, the Royal Theatre, the Bank Corner, Stegga's Arcade, the former AA Company offices on the south west corner of King and Steel Streets, and several commercial buildings in Hunter street.

Yet Miss Porter's House is unique in that it is the only heritage building to retain its original form, to house its original contents, and to continue to function as a going concern. Members of the Porter family occupied the House from 1909 to 1997: Since then the volunteer committee of the National Trust of Australia has maintained the building itself, the gardens and the valuable collection of artefacts housed there, and raised money towards its upkeep. Although Miss Porter's House presents a quiet face to the street, a great deal of activity is carried out there.

Miss Porter's House is, we believe, a keystone of heritage in the West End.

A brief history of the Porter Family and their house

This free-standing terrace house was built in 1909 for Herbert Porter and his bride-to-be Florence Jolly. Daughter Ella was born in 1911 and Hazel in 1914. Sadly, Herbert died in 1919 from influenza and Florence was left to raise the girls. She died in 1970. Ella and Hazel remained single and lived in the family home all their lives. Ella died in 1995 and Hazel in 1997. Hazel bequeathed the house and its remarkable collection of domestic and personal items to the National Trust.

The House was extensively damaged in the earthquake of 28 December 1989. Importantly, the juxtaposition of the old, undamaged bricks with the new bricks of the rebuilding, contribute to the story of the earthquake.

Herbert's father, James Porter, opened his first store in Hunter Street in about 1880 and later opened a newer one: this building was on the block at the Hunter Street end of 434 King Street. The Porters were a vital part of life in the West End and their several shops (at different times) were key commercial enterprises in the area.

Management of the House as a National Trust of Australia House Museum

Miss Porter's House is managed by a group of volunteers, who constitute the Miss Porter's House Management Committee, a committee of the National Trust of Australasia (NSW). (It is important to note that the National Trust is a registered charity, not a government institution). Currently the committee numbers about 33 people, from which an executive committee is elected. Committee members act as guides on the House's Open Days and other events, maintain the collection of Porter family belongings accrued across the period of Porter occupancy, tend the period garden, catalogue and digitise the collection (which may number as many as 6000 items), carry out minor repairs to the House and the collection, and raise money towards the House's upkeep.

Income is generated from admission fees, from fund raising events, from occasional grants from government sources, and from the National Trust's own slender resources. In a revitalised city, Miss Porter's House could attract more visitors - and more income - as a key tourist destination.

The value of the House in the revitalised city of Newcastle

Miss Porter's House's tag line is *Linking people of the past, the present and the future*. This tag encapsulates our philosophy: we see the House and collection as a tangible evidence of lives lived, and of the commercial, social and cultural history of the West End. The House and its collection is unrivalled in the West End as a repository of knowledge and experience.

But the value of the House grows with the passing of time. For very senior people the House is like those they used to know, contains objects familiar to them, and offers evidence of the life they lived. Thus a 90 year old is able to show her grandchild things that she used when she was the child's age. But for the

grandchildren, the House and its objects are strange. After all, sixteen year olds were born after the House came to the National Trust. Grandchildren understand grandparents- and parents - better through Miss Porter's House and its collection.

One can envisage Miss Porter's House occupying a place not dissimilar to the old churches that remain in major cities - Sydney is a prime example. Although these buildings are now surrounded by the new, and overshadowed by recent tall buildings, they remain as sentinels of our heritage.

It is our hope that the people of the City of Newcastle embrace Miss Porter's House as a link between the people of the past, the present and the future.

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